

A Song for His People

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[0 : 00] We can turn back to our reading in Isaiah chapter 26. We can just read again at the beginning of this chapter, Isaiah 26.!

It may seem strange to talk about a storm today when outside is such a gloriously sunny day.

But the storms of life is something that's always a reality to us. And I'm sure maybe you've heard of a phrase called the perfect storm. It's when two low pressures will come, maybe from different directions and merge together, and they bring a more serious storm that brings so much devastation and destruction with it.

This was a case in a film that was made a number of years ago now called by that name, The Perfect Storm. And it showed just how it happened on that occasion back in the 90s.

It was, I think. And it just showed the devastation and destruction that these kinds of storms can bring. It may seem a strange thing to call a storm a perfect storm when all it brings is devastation with it.

[1 : 41] But the perfect storm is something that the Bible speaks about as well. It speaks about it in a way when we see a collision taking place of different things merging together that bring a sense of devastation with it.

We see the perfect storm of sin. And everything that sin brings into this world. And how the more that sin brings its forces together, the more devastation and destruction it brings.

And when we think of a natural storm, when we think of the destruction that that brings, what do we look for at a time when a storm is coming?

We look for shelter. We seek shelter. And that is what Isaiah is talking about here. In chapter 26, he's talking there about not a perfect storm, but he's talking about a perfect peace.

And the peace that the Lord is able to give. You keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you.

[2 : 50] And so there is a place to find that perfect peace. And here in chapter 26, what we're seeing is a song that the Lord is giving to his people.

And a place that they can find this perfect peace. And it is in a city. It's a song of a city. We have a strong city.

It says at the start there in the middle of verse 1. And Isaiah is writing in the midst of this storm of sin. If you look back in chapter 24, just a page previously, the heading of that chapter is judgment on the whole earth.

And this judgment is like a storm. See how it speaks about it in verse 12. Desolation is left in the city. The gates are battered into ruins.

A city that is devastated. And it's really by sin. That's what Isaiah is highlighting for us here. The city that is battered, that is left in desolation as sin.

[3 : 58] Passes through. And so it's in the midst of this sense of judgment that Isaiah is writing. But it's also at a time when the people are thinking that they have peace.

And so it stands as a warning. What keeps us going from day to day so often? What keeps our hearts filled with joy and a sense of release in many different ways?

What gives us hope in difficult times? So often it's song. So often it's music that we turn to.

When we think of finding a sense of release and of joy, how often do we just start maybe singing a song? It's expressed in song so often.

And we all maybe have our own favorite song. And this time of year is a time when we're often maybe hearing songs being played when people are outside enjoying the good weather, whether it's in the garden or on the beach or out in the streets as we'll see in this coming week and out in the grounds as the weekend comes.

[5 : 09] When the tents go up, we'll hear a lot of song. We'll hear a lot of music being played. We'll hear a lot of people who are finding a sense of joy in that. But do we have that true sense of the joy of the Lord and the peace that he gives in the songs that we sing?

Well, here Isaiah is reminding the people that in all the different things that they have going on in their lives, and they themselves would have probably been singing their own songs in many different ways and many different situations.

Well, Isaiah is reminding them of the need to have this song of the Lord in their hearts. That it's the song of the Lord that is able to bring peace.

A song that speaks not just for the moment for today and a song that's forgotten in the days or the weeks ahead. We move on to the next one. But it's a song of a city, a song of salvation, a song of the joy that the Lord gives.

We want to just think about this song that Isaiah is giving here. And just think about it under three different headings. And we see three different things about this song.

[6 : 21] The first thing is it's the song of a city. So it's directing us towards a place. It's also directing us towards salvation.

So it's a song of salvation. And it's also a song of remembrance. A song that helps us to go back and reflect on these things again and again and again.

A song that we can keep singing. How often do you hear a song or even just a few lyrics of a song and it's stuck in your head the rest of the day?

I'm sure it happens very often to people. You just hear a little snippet of a song and it's just there in your head the rest of the day or even the rest of the week. Well, here is a song that should resonate in our hearts and stay in our hearts and stay with us through all the ups and downs of life to see a place of perfect peace that the Lord is able to give.

So the first thing we see is it's a song of a city. In that day, this song will be sung in the land of Judah, it starts. And then the song itself starts with these words, we have a strong city.

[7 : 39] We have a strong city. Cities were so important in the days of Isaiah. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament into the New Testament, you see the importance of cities.

They were more than just a place to live or to work or to study as we might think of today. They were places of safety, of security.

They were places where people felt they could dwell and dwell in that security to know that they were safe from the outside enemies. But no city was ever 100% secure.

There's always the fear that the enemy would attack and bring devastation. That devastation that we see in chapter 24 of Isaiah that the Lord was showing was going to come.

And you think of these cities in the days of Isaiah, their walls were thick, their doors were strong. They tried to have as few doors as possible so that there wasn't easy access into the city.

[8 : 46] And everywhere was well guarded. And secure. They would have their towers where people would be on watch, looking out to see if the enemy was coming.

And so the people had this sense of security in this city. But Isaiah is warning that the city that they are putting their trust in is not going to keep secure.

Battles are fought over cities. They have been throughout all generations. Here in the Old Testament, into the new to our present day, you find that when there's conflicts going on, cities or vantage points, high places, they're always important and they're always fought over.

Isaiah writes as God's people are enjoying this peace and security, but a battle is on the horizon. And at the heart of this battle that's coming is not just the enemy that's around them, but the enemy within them.

You see, their hearts have gone cold towards the Lord. They've forgotten the Lord. They have been disobedient to the Lord. They've forgotten all his goodness to them, and they've just started doing their own thing, turning to their own ways.

[10 : 08] And that's what this song is about. It's got warning in it, but it's also got reminders in it as well. That as the battle is on the horizon, as the enemy is about to attack, that they can look to God and see with him that he has a city for his people, a city where they will dwell secure.

We have a strong city, he says there. He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. So there is a city of God, a place of refuge.

And what a song that is to sing in the midst of the enemy attacking, that they have the Lord on their side. But it's a question to us today, do we have the Lord in that sense?

Do we look for just the here and now and the cities or the towns or the villages that we live in and have our sense of peace and that all is well?

Is that the way that we are living our lives just now? Are we thinking about the future? Are we thinking about eternity? Are we thinking where we will dwell secure forever?

[11 : 23] Or is that just something for way down the road or for not at all? Well, God gives his people a city to look forward to. A city that will be a secure place for his people for all eternity.

So no matter what this world brings to us, that we have a place to look forward to. A place described in Revelation 21, where John sees this vision of a city.

He says there in verse 10, he carried me away in the spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper clear as crystal.

It had a great high wall and with 12 gates. So John there in Revelation is looking to the city that God has promised for his people.

The same city that Abraham, by faith, was able to look to as well. In Hebrews 11, verse 9, it speaks about Abraham there. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him to the same promise.

[12 : 41] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. God is preparing a city for his people.

So we won't just live with our minds on this world and this place and the fulfillment that we seek in this life, but instead that we will think of God who has prepared a place for his people.

A battle has been fought for us that we maybe even don't realize that the Lord Jesus came into this world to go to battle, to go to war for his people, that they might dwell secure in a city of salvation forever.

Do you realize what this city means? In this world, in this day, we sing our songs, and so many do sing their songs of enjoyment and fulfillment, but it's only temporary.

But here we have a song for the ages, a song for the generations, and a song for eternity, a song of a city that is strong and secure, and for God's people, we have a strong city.

[13 : 59] Whatever may come, we will remain secure if we are trusting in God. We also see the second thing here, it's a song of salvation.

We have a strong city. He sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks. If you go through chapter 24 to 27 here, salvation is what ties it all together.

When you see the devastation of chapter 24, even in the midst of that, as we saw in verse 12, where it speaks about desolation is left in the city, you jump forward to verse 14, and it speaks of the joy of song.

They lift up their voices, they sing for joy over the majesty of the Lord. They shout from the west. Therefore, in the east, give up glory to the Lord. And so it goes on.

In the midst of devastation, there's still singing, there's still song. And what is the song? It's the song of salvation in the Lord. This chapter, and you see it too in chapter 27 there, it begins with these words, in that day.

[15 : 19] So it's looking to a point where God is going to act. And sometimes it's talking about God acting in the now, and sometimes it's talking about God acting finally in the day of judgment.

But at all these points, we see that God is acting. God is doing something for his people. If you look at how it's in verse, chapter 25, verse 9 there, it speaks about, it'll be said on that day, behold, this is our God.

We have waited for him that he might save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. So all throughout, the fact that judgment is coming is the hope of salvation.

that there is this joy, that there is this singing and song of salvation that the people of God have when they trust in him.

We have this song, he says, and salvation is at the heart of it. And we see here, God is working.

[16 : 33] And that this salvation comes from relationship with him. In verse 3 in chapter 26, you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you.

There is this relationship. There is this joy in knowing the Lord as our refuge, as our strength in time of trouble.

Salvation comes from knowing God. And salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. And we set our mind on him. And when you think of the battle that Jesus has won for his people, when he was taken outside of the city, outside of Jerusalem, onto a hill at Calvary, and there he fought a battle that we could never fight ourselves.

There he gave his life that we might have salvation in him. We read that in Hebrews 13, verse 12. And so Jesus also suffered, it says, outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

He went outside of the city. He went to face the enemy for us that we might have salvation through him. There was an army chaplain during the First World War.

[17 : 59] He was called John Esselmunt Adams. He was 49 years old when the war broke out. And he'd been a minister in Scotland.

And within a month or two of the war starting, he found himself at the front line of battle in the trenches alongside the other troops.

And there he spoke about the reality of war and how people would see their own eternity there before them, of how many were lost in a moment, in a blink.

And he spoke about it in this way of seeing, fighting men. He spoke, multitudes have had their faith deepened and multitudes have learned as never before the need and the value of faith in God.

When the reality was right in front of them of their eternity, their need of God was made so much clearer. And for us, we've maybe lost that perspective of eternity and eternity being before us.

[19 : 10] But we're reminded again and again and again of how eternity is within a blink. The tragedies that we see happening all around us.

Famous people, we've seen it with a footballer, two footballers, two brothers, Diego and Andre died in a tragic car accident. The devastation that that brings, eternity in a moment.

We saw it in the last week with the devastating floods in Texas. How just in a moment so suddenly eternity is there before our eyes.

and we seem to think that we're living in peace. But none of us know what is ahead of us and how in a moment, in a blink, eternity is there.

But do we have this song of salvation? John Esselstyn Adams, he spoke about where these men found their hope in the time of need.

[20 : 15] he said the most read book was the New Testament. And he said one man, a machine gun officer, he writes to say he never read so much of it at home, but that it's the only book he can settle to read as he sits through the long nights in the trenches beside his gun.

He found his hope in the gospel, in the word of God. And here is the word of God before us today. The word of God that gives us a song of salvation to sing.

Salvation that has come at a great price because the Lord Jesus gave his life so that we might have eternal life.

Eternity is before us all. But are we singing the song of salvation? Are we trusting in the Lord with all our hearts?

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you. Do you have that peace? Are you trusting in the Lord?

[21 : 29] Well, it's a song of remembrance finally we see here as well. Song of a city, a song of salvation and a song of remembrance. In verse 4 there we are told, Trust in the Lord forever for the Lord is an everlasting rock.

And then in verse 8 and 9, In the path of your judgments, O Lord, we wait for you. Your name and remembrance are the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for you in the night.

My spirit within me earnestly seeks you. And so we see here it's a call to remembrance. To remember the Lord today.

To remember the Lord as we have opportunity. To yearn for him. To trust in the Lord forever. Peace is something we speak of and pray for often.

and yet in this world that's full of sin it's always only temporary. Wars and conflicts and suffering goes on generation after generation.

[22 : 44] And so it will be. Because the word of God tells us there will be wars and rumors of war until the coming of the Lord. Lord. But are we learning anything in the midst of it?

Are we learning anything for our own soul even today? Do we have that peace? Do we have this song that we can call to remembrance?

A song that gives us hope in the midst of all the different things that we experience in life? When you hear a song being played that you're familiar with very often it will take you back to a moment or a time in your life to an experience.

It might be a day in your life. It might be a portion in your life. But a song can often take us back to remember different things, to remember different times, places, and people.

But this song, it always takes us back to think of God. The song of a city. We have a strong city, a city of salvation, a city that we are to remember every day that we have a hope in the Lord.

[23 : 58] So as we go on trusting in the Lord, we call to mind his goodness, his mercy that follows us all the days. And the question could be asked as we call these things to mind, how do we get in to this city?

How do we find this place of refuge, this place of rest? We can be used to coming and going from cities as we please.

We can drive into cities from all different directions. We arrive by planes, trains, cars, all sorts of ways. But in the days of Isaiah, to find your way into a city, it was more complicated.

You had to find that gate that let you in. You had to pass through a gate that had to be opened for you. You had to be let in. Well, here it speaks about getting into this city.

Call to remembrance your name and the desire of our soul is to see you. But when we think of getting into this city, we have to think about, well, what is the way in?

[25 : 13] Well, the way in is through faith. You think about going in to a football match or a stadium for a concert. How do you get in?

You go through a turnstile. You go through a narrow axis. And you have to give your ticket or scan your code or whatever it is, but there has to be a way where you gain access in.

You can't just appear and go through the gate without any ID or any access, any ticket. You won't get in. Well, the way in to this city, the way into this place that God is speaking about here is by faith.

By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the only way to get in. By trusting in him.

to gain access is to believe. And to believe in the only one who is able to save.

[26 : 22] We have to fix our mind on him. Keep your mind on the Lord Jesus. Trust in him. Trust in the Lord forever.

For the Lord God is an everlasting rock. He is a place of security. An eternal place. He has access to this city.

He is the access to this salvation. And we are to call to mind and remember all that the Lord has done. In verse 12, it speaks of there, O Lord, you will ordain peace for us.

You have done for us all our works. He has done everything for us. Are we singing this song of salvation?

In our week, when we will hear many songs being sung, many that we may be familiar with and sing along with ourselves, may we remember this song of a city, this song of salvation, this song to remember what the Lord has done for his people.

[27 : 32] let us trust in him. Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we do thank you that you give that joy of song in our hearts and that song that is able to express the hope that we have in you.

In a city you have prepared for your people, a place of peace and rest for all who put their trust in you. And we do pray, Lord, that your blessing would help us to call these things through remembrance in all the days ahead, that you would guide us by your spirit, guide us by your truth, by your word, to be able to look and fix our hearts and our souls, our minds on our Lord Jesus Christ and to follow him the way to perfect peace.

Hear our prayers and continue with us. That's all we ask. We ask in his precious name. Amen. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 48a, the Sing Psalms version.

Find this on page 63. Psalm 48a will sing from verse 9 down to the end of the psalm.

We contemplate your steadfast love within your house, O God, for like your name, your praise extends through all the earth abroad.

[29 : 01] All that you do is righteous, Lord, Mount Sion's joy is great, and Judah's towns rejoice as they your judgment celebrate. And then you have these words in verse 12, round Sion walk and count our towers, view every citadel.

Speaking there about that city of peace and protection, and then it goes on to say, so that to children yet unborn her story you may tell. It's a song that is to be shared and remembered for all generations.

We'll sing from verse 9, the tune is Morvan, 9 to 14, we stand to sing to God's praise. Amen. We contemplate praise.

Let your steadfast love within you house, O God.

For like your name, your praise extends through all the earth abroad.

[30 : 20] All that you do is righteous, Lord, Mount Zion's joy is great, and Judah's times rejoice as they your judgments celebrate.

Round Zion walk and countertiles view every citadel, so that to children yet unborn a story you may tell.

For God the Lord, who is our God, forever will abide, he is our God forevermore, and to the end our guide.

We'll close with a benediction, and after the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.